Special Report From Cuba

Gulf Between Washington and Havana Deeper Even Than Between Washington and Moscow

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No Painless Diplomacy for The Ache of Castroism

My first morning back in Havana I bought all the papers and went to work on them after breakfast with my Spanish-English dictionary. The most promising item seemed to be a two column editorial on the front page of the Communist paper *Hoy* with a heading in large type, "The Worst Enemy." I expected a diatribe against the CIA, Guatemala, American imperialism or those wicked ones in Miami. Instead it turned out to be an attack on careless driving and automobile accidents. "The counter-revolutionary enemies with all their attacks, crimes and sabotage," *Hoy* complained, "have caused us fewer deaths than these accidents." There are people who will find it discouraging to learn that reckless driving can still be a main topic of concern in Havana.

Little Sign of Black Marketing

Outwardly at least, in the warm February sunshine, Havana seemed to have changed little from the city as I saw it last August. Lines of taxicabs and limousines still waited outside the hotels for the tourists who weren't there. More buildings seemed to have one or two soldiers on guard in front of them. But there was little indication either of siege or of unrest. The only visible remains of the great January invasion scare were tattered posters saying "Death to the Invader" with a tongue-in-cheek quotation from Fidel, "We know that we are not alone and that an attack on Cuba will lead to its own destruction. But, nevertheless, we don't want them to commit suicide on our coast." In the early morning sunshine, the white trucks marked Limpieza de Calle (Street Cleaning) were already sprinkling the Prado while platoons of white wings swept and washed the square behind them. There was no sign of a gasoline shortage; traffic was heavy. Except for two new Soviet magazines, *Union Sovietica* and *China Reconstruye,* and the absence of the *New York Times,* the news stands seemed unchanged. There was no sign of inflation in the prices marked in the shop windows, nor of rationing in the restaurants. Only once, during a week's stay, was I to be accosted by a money changer, though the peso on the black market is supposed to be less than half the legal rate of one-to-one for the dollar. The Castro regime seemed very much a going-concern.

"Every Home A School"

Despite the breaking off of relations, a stray American encountered no signs of hostility. On the contrary he was made to feel by the friendly welcome in the streets that it was a positive morale builder to see an American. Sloppy Joe's was still the emptiest and most mournful looking bar in town, and the big news was that Castro and his entire Cabinet were going out to cut sugar cane Sunday. Some 112,000 had already volunteered to cut cane with them, and

NOTICE

We regret that we were unable to publish last week in order to make possible a trip to Cuba, on which we begin our report in this week's issue. Passport validation by the State Department and special visa authorization by the Cuban Foreign Ministry came suddenly just after we had gone to press the week before, when it was too late to announce this in advance.

the papers, along with instructions on where to mobilize, were warning volunteers to bring along their own lunches. The newest crop of wall posters proclaimed this the year of the struggle against illiteracy; Cuba hopes in one year to do what UNESCO says would take ten: to teach everyone to read and write. Small armies of teachers are going out into the countryside; housemaids go to special night classes in the towns; signs proclaim, "make every home a school."

The Don Quixote in the Family of Nations

In official circles, and among supporters of the regime, there is an atmosphere of revolutionary euphoria which strikes even a sympathetic visitor as dangerously unrealistic. If ever a little country was giddy with success, it is Castro's Cuba. My purpose in going down to Cuba was to see what changes had taken place since my last visit in August and to explore the possibilities of a peaceful settlement between the U.S. and Cuba. The euphoria—and the demagogy—appalled me. I set off to Cuba in a mood of optimism. I found myself returning, not in despair, but in that mood of awed and helpless wonder with which one looks on at the unfolding of an heroic tragedy. The gulf between Washington and Havana is deeper even than that between Washington and Moscow. The Fidelistas are living in a dream world, a world which revolves around Cuba but as they see it also contains that big weakling to the north, the United States, and that distant but doting foster parent, the Soviet Union, which is ready on notice from Havana to plunge the whole world into atomic war if Uncle Sam misbehaves. There were moments when a visitor was made to feel that if we North Americans are not careful, Cuba might annex the United States and liberate its suffering people from the yoke of monopoly capitalism. Castro's Cuba is the Don Quixote in the world family of nations today.

My own mission was perhaps a little Quixotic, too. I had hoped to come back with news and interviews to show how easily and painlessly peace could be achieved between Washington and Havana. I am afraid I had it all figured out in advance. I expected the Cuban leaders to see that it was

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How Liberalize Cuba After Making Her Dependent on Soviets . . .

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impractical to create a completely socialized state just off the shores of the USA; to learn from the fate of Nagy in Hungary that a revolutionary regime has to be circumspect in dealing with a big powerful neighbor; to be ready, as similarly placed regimes have been, to avoid the provocative and to work out a modus vivendi within these political realities.

I felt that the Castro regime could save the agrarian reform and the industrialization program on a basis of socialism if it was willing to settle for a mixed society, to negotiate some compensation for U.S. properties, and to restore some. Obviously it could not give up the sugar and cattle latifundia without giving up its raison d'etre, and it could not give up the industrialization program which is the counterpart of agrarian reform. But in between there were possibilities of face-saving concessions which would do the Cubans no harm. There was no reason why such concerns as F. W. Woolworth should not be allowed to resume business, or that room could not be found within the area of industrialization for some cooperation with foreign firms, as has been done in Ghana and Guinea.

U. S. Fear of a Soviet Base

In the political realm—I might as well make a clean breast of this—I envisaged a declaration of ultimate free elections and ultimate restoration of fundamental political liberties. I felt that Cuba would have to end the situation in which the Communist party was the only legally existing party in Cuba, perhaps by merging it in a united revolutionary party led by the Fidelistas. I could see the U.S. adjusting to a one-party regime in Cuba of the kind which has led revolutions from Mexico to Ghana. But I could see no possibility of a peaceful settlement if Cuba allowed the Communists alone to operate outside the framework of the July 26 movement. In other words I felt that Cuba might save the achievements of the revolution if it offered some face-saving compromises to Washington and assurance that Cuba would not become a Soviet base in this hemisphere. By this last, I do not necessarily mean a military base, but a political base.

Starting with this all-too-neat blueprint, I found a whole series of negative factors in Havana. There was a misconception of the United States fully as distorted as our view of Cuba. There was a heady youthful recklessness which can lead this regime very easily to overplay its hand. There was an attitude toward the Soviet bloc which can only be described as a naive kind of infantile leftism. There was a daring conception of Cuba as the leader of a hemispheric upsurge against Yanqui imperialism which portends bad relations not only with the United States but with the more cautious regimes to the south of Cuba. It is a pity Khrushchov does not visit Havana. He would get as big a scare in Havana as he probably does in Peking.

In short, your wistful liberal pilgrim found himself face to face in Havana with a full-fledged revolution, in all its creative folly and self-deceptive enthusiasm. To ask it to be sensible was like asking a volcano to take it easy. Nothing could be harder for an observer from a rich status quo society than to understand a group of desperate idealists striving within a short time to remake a poor colonial society in the shadow of a hostile great power. Perhaps it could be attempted only by smoking a little political marijuana to keep up their courage. Every Cuban effort for reform during the last half century has met warnings—usually true, as it turned out—that the U.S. would never allow it. I must have seemed another in that mournful procession of warning liberals.

U.S. Won't Let Cuba Be Moderate

Walking the streets, trying hard to digest the experience, one had to recognize that in this case what U.S. policy would not allow were moderate, mixed-society solutions. These are possible only where countries are still able to deal with both sides in the East-West struggle. But by our oil and sugar policies, we have made Cuba completely dependent on the Soviet bloc; one might as well ask for a mixed society in Outer Mongolia. Our oil embargo would have brought Cuban economic life to a standstill within a few weeks but for Soviet oil and Soviet tankers. Our refusal to buy Cuban sugar would have been as disastrous for the Cuban economy if the Soviet bloc had not come to Castro's rescue. Once the ties with the U.S. had been broken, it was easier to barter sugar for equipment from the Soviet bloc and set out to industrialize the island on a socialist basis than to try the long drawn-out process of luring capitalist investment from other Western countries which would hesitate to allow it in the face of U.S. hostility. What France did in Guinea, we did in Cuba. Castro, like Sekou Touré, was left with no alternative. Indeed Castro's position is worse. Guinea is still bush country. Cuba is not; its sugar mills, its transport, its electric power, depend on imported oil. Castro's oil supply, his sugar market and now his industrialization program depend entirely on the good-will of the Soviet bloc. Like the fallen maiden in the melodrama, Castro may well cry out to Washington, "You made me what I am today."

On the Way to A Popular Democracy

With this economic and political dependence have come ideological changes. For the first time, in talking with Fidelista intellectuals, I felt that Cuba was on its way to becoming a Soviet-style Popular Democracy. Again for this the U.S. shares responsibility. A combination of factors is pushing Cuba in this direction. On the one side is gratitude toward the Soviet bloc, dependence on its good will, a desire to flatter by imitating its methods. On the other hand is repulsion for the United States, and fear of the interventionist groups we are supporting. The familiar chain reaction of counter revolution is at work, stirring suspicion, strengthening the secret police and arbitrary legal methods; these in turn create new hostility to the regime. A general tightening up of controls is in progress, though the only visible signs of opposition in Havana are religious. There are placards in many shop windows asking, "Will your child be a believer or an atheist?" and announcing that March 5 will be Catechism Day. The night I arrived a band of youths in ragged procession were marching down the Prado shouting the Catholic slogan, "Cuba, si; Russia, no."

It is to Castro's credit that there are few signs of a cult of personality, but the press is completely Fidelista. While the bookstores are still full of heretical anti-Communist works,

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. . . And Setting Poor Example by Imposing Iron Curtain on Her?

there has been a steady infection of totalitarian ideas. This is evident when one brings up the question of a free press and of ultimate free elections. On the former one encounters vague Rousseauist ideas, and no very clear answers are elicited. There seems to be an oversimplified notion that so long as the press is freed from the influence of big business monopolies, there is no longer a problem. The press—so goes this populist mysticism—then expresses the will of the majority, or of the working class or of the people's state. The idea that a free press, with the right of the individual to express dissenting views, has a role to play in any society, capitalist or socialist, begins to seem as counter revolutionary in Cuba, as in East Germany or Hungary. As for free elections, I was told that once the economic problems of a society are solved, there was no need for politics; all problems would then merely be technical, and could be handled by technicians!

In the Name of Liberty

It is difficult, against the background of Latin American misery and U.S. relations, for an American liberal to talk with his Cuban opposite numbers of free press, free elections and the rule of law. These ideals have been so dirtied in practice; Latin Americans have known so little of them; we ourselves have so far abandoned them; that it is very hard to make Latin Americans see any reality behind the rhetoric. On a wall in Havana I saw a poster which quoted Bolivar as saying, "The United States seems destined by Providence to plague America with miseries in the name of liberty." It was not pleasant to hear Fidel in a rather demagogic speech the Saturday night after my arrival taunt the United States for putting down an iron curtain around Cuba and forbidding its citizens to travel there. "What do they confess with this?" Castro asked. "Their failure and their fear of the example and of the truth, and of the influence that Cuba has not only in Latin America but in the United States itself." How can an American liberal argue convincingly in Cuba for a free press and against arbitrary government when we ourselves set up barriers to free communication?

I had no way of really judging how serious are the interventionist guerrillas dropped in the Escambray hills and perhaps elsewhere. But I am inclined to suspect that these activities give the Castro regime a shot in the arm, a danger with which to energize and mobilize the people, costly in terms of militiamen withdrawn from production but perhaps worth the cost. The effect is to give the regime an excuse further to tighten its controls. The logic of the struggle is to destroy the moderates. It is as if the U.S. felt that it could effectively fight Castroism in Latin America only by pushing Cuba into the Soviet bloc and into an internal struggle with the Catholic Church. On the other hand, within Cuba, the hostility of the U.S. has strengthened the radicals and left the regime with little alternative but to seize more properties in order to obtain revenue, to wipe out middle class opposition and to press forward while it can on the industrialization of Cuba. At the same time, our effort to mobilize Latin America against Castro, forces his regime to take counter-measures and raise the Latin American masses against us. Thus the stage is being set for a hemispheric struggle unless a settlement between Washington and Moscow can bring as its corollary a settlement between Washington and Havana.

Cubans to Train in Soviet Schools

Major Guevara in a TV report of Jan. 6 gave some figures on the number of Cuban students and skilled workers to be trained in the Soviet countries. He said he had signed agreements covering 2400 people "who will travel to the socialist countries, with the exception of Mongolia and Viet Nam which have but a small industrial capacity, to take courses of study in technology. Of the total of Cuban technological students, about one-third or 800 will go to the Soviet Union; 180 industrial workers and 40 students of technical subjects will go to [East] Germany, plus 20 engineering students; to Czechoslovakia are going 200 engineering students, 50 science students and 350 skilled workers, a total of 600; to Peoples China are going a total of 200 skilled workers; to Poland are going 60 university students, 15 science students, and 180 skilled workers, a total of 255." Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria are taking smaller numbers.

When China Has Oil to Spare

When Washington clamped down on Castro's oil, he could turn to Moscow. If Moscow were now to bring pressure, he has nowhere to go. If China had an excess of petroleum and a fleet of tankers, Castro would still have an alternative. Indeed, the Cuban problem illustrates what the Kremlin will be up against when China is a major industrial power. The Cuban leaders admire the Russians, but lean toward Peking. There is a curious economic reason visible in the comprehensive report Major Ernesto Guevara made over the Cuban TV January 6 on his return from the Soviet bloc. Except for China, no other country in the Soviet bloc really needs Cuba's one export commodity—sugar. The Soviet Union, as Major Guevara explained, "is at present the world's largest sugar producer. Exactly two years ago the Soviet Union beat Cuba's output and is now the largest producer as a result of its execution of a vast sugar development plan." East Europe has its own beet sugar.

All the East European satellites together only promise to take 300,000 tons of Cuban sugar while smaller token amounts as gestures of good-will, were taken by the Asian satellites. North Korea, 20,000 tons; North Vietnam, 5,000 tons and Outer Mongolia, 1,000 tons. The biggest contract, naturally, was with the Soviet Union, but this contained a curious proviso. "The Soviet Union," Major Guevara said, "undertakes to buy 2,700,000 tons of sugar in the event that the United States fails to buy sugar, an event which seems most likely." This proviso seems to reflect two premises, one economic and the other political. The first is that the Soviet Union does not need sugar. The second is that it is not disposed to shut the door on a resumption of normal trade relations between the U.S and Cuba. The Russians could shut that door simply by a firm contract to take over the bulk of the Cuban sugar crop. By leaving the door open, they also leave the door open to negotiations with Washington in which Cuba may figure. In this connection, it should be noted that if the summit conference hadn't broken down last year, the Rus-

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Cuban Leaders As Light-Headed As The Chinese on Subject of Nuclear War

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sians would have been much less ready to step in when the oil embargo was imposed on Cuba last July. The Cubans may fear a rapprochement between Washington and Moscow.

Cuba Shares China's Fears

In this, their position is similar to that of China, which also fears being isolated by a Russo-American understanding. China's economics, like China's politics, fit those of the Castro regime. China is buying 1,000,000 tons of sugar. "With the Peoples Republic of China," as Major Guevara said in his radio report, "the problems are entirely different because sugar is very scarce in China. Our agreement with China for a credit of 100 million pesos and our contract to supply China with 1,000,000 tons of sugar will be implemented without difficulty." Indeed China's potential market could easily make Cuba independent of the U.S. sugar market. Major Guevara pointed out that China "is a country with less than two kilograms per capita annual consumption of sugar while in Cuba the figure is around 40 kilograms and in industrialized countries between 30 and 40 kilograms per capita. Were China to raise that consumption to 10 kg, still a low figure per capita per annum, it would demand Cuba's entire crop of 7,000,000 tons, or a lot more than our present annual output of 6,000,000 tons."

Like China, Cuba is a revolutionary power with a revolutionary mentality, and a revolutionary attitude toward war, even in the atomic age. The attitude of the Castro regime is indicated in another section of the Guevara broadcast where he said:

> **"Cuba is engaged in an economic war and nearly, but not quite, in a kind of warfare which is not simply economic, against a mighty power and with the support of another mighty power. We of Cuba must do our part because we are not onlookers in this struggle between two colossi over Cuba; we are a very important, a most important part in that struggle. We must maintain the unity of our people and the spirit of our people, their capacity for sacrifice, present and expandable. This capacity of our people for sacrifice must be expanded far more than it is now because it is a fact known to one familiar with the history of all of the socialist countries that here in Cuba we have had practically no experience of suffering. Here in Cuba we mention the figure of 20 thousand dead but over there in China they put the figure at 20 million dead. . . . China and the Soviet Union know the vast loss of millions of their citizens. They love peace deeply. The Soviet Union and its citizens are impregnated with the thought of peace and the conviction that they can win all of their goals by peaceful means. Yet, they are ready to go to the destruction of all they have in a war characterized by the use of atomic weaponry and unimaginable destruction of lives simply for the sake of maintaining their principle and protecting Cuba."**

Major Guevara is the least demagogic and the most sober, though perhaps also the most revolutionary, of all the Cuban leaders. It is to be doubted whether the Chinese, much less the Russians, are quite that ready to die for Cuba; the real danger is that step by step both sides in the East-West struggle may be drawn into positions over Cuba where they can no longer draw back. I found most Fidelistas quite light-headed in their attitude toward war, and in their faith that the Soviet Union would cheerfully risk its existence to support Cuba. Little Cuba is in fact turning against us the whole idea of massive deterrence—the idea that the nation which is ready to risk bringing the planet down in nuclear suicide holds the winning hand. In this, too, the Cuban psychology is like the Chinese rather than the Russians, and though no one said so, I suspect that like Peking the Cubans too consider us a "paper tiger." The oil and sugar companies by forcing us into an intransigeant attitude toward the Cuban revolution have created a problem of formidable proportions on our doorstep but the full implications and possible solution must be left to next week's issue.

Just Be Perfect—That's All

"Cultivate the most noble sentiments of a human being. Be honorable and moral and always set a good example for others."

—"Duties of A Good Revolutionary," poster of the Education Ministry, in the Sevilla-Biltmore, Havana.

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